

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
STAFF NOTE

Action/Discussion Item:

704 KAR 3:340, Commonwealth Diploma Program (Final)

Applicable Statute or Regulation:

704 KAR 3:340; KRS 156.070; KRS 156:160

Action Question:

Should the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) give final approval to 704 KAR 3:340, Commonwealth Diploma Program?

History/Background:

Existing Policy. The current requirements for the Commonwealth Diploma are based on students completing at least 22 units of credit including the minimum graduation requirements, any additional courses specified by the local board of education, successful completion of the pre-college curriculum, at least four (4) Advanced Placement (AP) or four (4) International Baccalaureate (IB) courses with a grade of “C” or better, and completion of one (1) AP Examination in at least three (3) of the AP or IB content areas without regard to score.

Recent Discussion. The KBE asked staff to review the current program and to propose revisions to the Commonwealth Diploma Program to ensure that it is: 1) rigorous and performance-based, 2) includes opportunities for students to earn the Commonwealth Diploma through a broader range of course work directly aligned to the Individual Graduation Plan, and 3) credentials exceptional achievement. In October and December, the KBE reviewed proposed changes in the requirements for a student to earn a Commonwealth Diploma. The KBE asked staff to bring the regulation back to the Board for action to coincide with discussion and action on changes to the minimum requirements for high school graduation. Attachment A is a chart of unresolved issues and KDE recommendations. Attachment B is the proposed regulation as recommended by staff.

Policy Issues:

Unresolved issues in need of discussion and action include:

- ☐ Required ACT/SAT score as one qualifier for Commonwealth Diploma
- ☐ Requiring a specific course grade in Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate course work
- ☐ Requiring a passing AP/IB exam score to earn a Commonwealth Diploma
- ☐ Requiring course work in a world language to earn a Commonwealth Diploma

Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) staff approached its recommendations with the understanding that the intent of the Commonwealth Diploma is to recognize students who choose a more rigorous high school experience and are highly successful in their efforts.

ACT/SAT score. It is important to note that obtaining a required score on ACT/SAT is one qualifier for the Commonwealth Diploma. Students may also become eligible for the Diploma if they score Proficient on three of the four content area tests under the Kentucky Core Content Tests in reading, mathematics, science and social studies given in the tenth and eleventh grades. KDE recommends an ACT score of 26 or higher or SAT score of 1200 or higher in order to be eligible for the Commonwealth Diploma. A review of several Kentucky college and university scholarship programs revealed a range of 24-28 on the ACT as a qualifier. 26 is a reasonable midpoint in this range to require for this Diploma designed to recognize academic excellence. Some have suggested using the ACT scores affiliated with the English and Mathematics Postsecondary Placement Policy. Their policy calls for an 18 on the English subsection and a 22 on the mathematics subsection. KDE staff sees this as too low of an expectation for Commonwealth Diploma purposes.

Grade requirements in AP/IB course work. The current program guidelines call for a “C” or better in the AP/IB courses taken. KDE staff recommends that a more appropriate measure of academic excellence would be a “B” or better as a definition of successful completion for Commonwealth Diploma purposes. A review of scholarship programs in several Kentucky colleges and universities revealed a GPA in the range of 3.3-3.5 to be required for qualification purposes. Requiring a combination of a standard of excellence on the ACT/SAT and grades consistent with the expectations that lead to academic scholarships may prove to make the Commonwealth Diploma more meaningful.

Requiring a passing score on one AP/IB exam. Data on the pass rate for students on AP exams in districts that awarded a Commonwealth Diploma in the most recent school year (2004-2005) revealed a startling statistic. Kentucky districts that awarded Commonwealth Diplomas last year had a pass rate of less than 25% on the AP/IB exams. This compares poorly with the state average of 46.11% and the national average of 57.56%. It is hoped that requiring passage of at least one AP/IB exam will encourage students and schools to focus on students being successful on the exams.

World Language. The Commonwealth Diploma program has required two courses in a world language since the pre-college curriculum was adopted by the Council on Postsecondary Education. Since the pre-college curriculum is no longer being referenced in the Commonwealth Diploma regulation due to the alignment of the high school graduation requirements to postsecondary and workplace expectations, it is necessary to specifically reference world language course work in the regulation if it is to remain a requirement. The Advanced Placement course in a world language requirement is being omitted to allow for more flexibility in AP coursework. The requirement of AP foreign language served as a barrier to some students receiving a Commonwealth Diploma, as most students needed to take two years of a foreign language prior to enrollment in an AP foreign language class.

Staff Recommendation(s) and Rationale:

Staff recommends the KBE give final approval to the amendments found in the attached version of 704 KAR 3:340. The proposal provides greater flexibility for students to earn the diploma, specifies performance standards for earning the diploma and maintains rigorous course work for students. It must be remembered that the Commonwealth Diploma is awarded in order to recognize exceptional academic achievement and is well beyond the minimum high school graduation requirements. The additional option for earning the Commonwealth Diploma to allow for a combination of two dual credit courses and two AP or IB courses (704 KAR 3:340 Section 3(4)) provides additional flexibility for individual student choice while maintaining rigor.

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

Proficiency in all content areas involves students taking rigorous courses, a level of student accountability and attainment of performance standards.

Groups Consulted and Brief Summary of Responses:

- Instructional Support Network (October 12, 2005) - Comments were supportive in relation to added flexibility. Some members expressed concern about limiting the chance of students to earn the award based on one measure of assessment. The proposed changes have added flexibility in this area.
- Kentucky Association of Secondary School Principals (November 3) - Group was supportive of added flexibility as well as expanded opportunity in relation to AP/IB course areas.
- Local Superintendents Advisory Council (November 29, 2005) - Members voted unanimously to approve the proposed changes in the regulation with the exception that the implementation year be changed from 2010 to 2012.

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Commissioner of Education**Date:**

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